

Approved For Release 2004/11/29 : CIA-RDP91-00901R000500050003-8

ASSOCIATED PRESS

21 July 1987

Former CIA Chief Says America Faces Constitutional Question

By RICH CARTIERE, Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO

oversight

Former CIA Director William E. Colby says he believes the dilemma posed by the Iran-Contra affair is whether Americans want to continue Congressional review of covert operations, which he thinks works well.

"If you're going to run a secret operation, yes, they have to be secret. ... They also have to be well thought out, and run under authority," Colby said Monday in a speech to 500 members of the World Affairs Council of Northern California.

"If they don't stand up to independent review by Congress, then maybe we shouldn't be doing them, and maybe we'd save ourselves a lot of trouble."

Oversight by select committees of the House and Senate was adopted at the beginning of Colby's tenure at the Central Intelligence Agency following several scandals in the early 1970s over illegal covert operations. Colby served as director of the CIA from 1973-76.

He encouraged Americans to "reaffirm that our Constitution applies to everything we do in the way we run our country."

"We may not be able to keep all the secrets that some other country would, but I think we end up a stronger country because of the cohesion that's due to the participation of our people."

Colby argued that Congressional review has allowed the CIA to conduct several covert actions abroad without major controversy by building political support beforehand.

"I found that if there is a consensus about a secret program, that it basically makes sense, then it either will remain secret or even if it comes out it will cause no problem," Colby said.

As an example, he cited American support for rebels in Afghanistan, which he said was leaked to the media two years ago and has stirred little controversy.

Continued

It was approved ahead of time by the Congressional oversight committees, he said.

Colby dismissed claims made two weeks ago by Lt. Col. Oliver North, the former National Security Council aide, that Congress couldn't be trusted with some intelligence secrets.

North has admitted misleading Congress about NSC operations to fund Nicaraguan rebels with proceeds from arms sales to Iran. In testimony before a Congressional committee, North implied Congress couldn't be trusted.

"I know lots of Congressmen who have kept a lot of secrets," said Colby.

Colby called the actions of North and former National Security Advisor John Poindexter those of "enthusiastic amateurs," not typical of the "modern intelligence system" the CIA runs.

On Monday, Poindexter defended misleading Congress and the public about the Iran arms deals on the grounds that the American people "don't want to know" U.S. secrets.